SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
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CONVERSATIONS

With William Perry

William Perry was sworn in as secretary of defense in February following a unanimous vote by the Senate. He previously served as deputy secretary of defense from March 5, 1993, until his confirmation as secretary. Prior to his nomination as deputy secretary he was chairman of Technology Strategies and Alliances, a professor in the School of Engineering at Stanford University, and codirector of Stanford's Center for International Security and Arms Control.

Perry was a founder of ESL in 1964 and served as its president until 1977. Prior to that, he was with Sylvania/General Telephone and was director of their Electronic Defense Laboratories. He has also served as executive vice president of Hambrecht and Quist, an investment banking firm specializing in high-technology companies.

From 1977 to 1981, he served as under secretary of defense for research and engineering and was responsible for all weapons systems procurement and all research and development. He was the secretary of defense's principal advisor on technology, communications, intelligence, and atomic energy.

Perry received a B.S. and M.S. from Stanford University and a Ph.D. from Penn State, all in mathematics. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The president's new national security strategy has given a much broader definition to national security, including the promotion of prosperity at home and democracy abroad, along with traditional defense activities. What implications does this strategy have for the DOD?

Our military strategy is designed to deal with three different contingencies. The first of those is concerned with vital national security interests—interests in which the survival of the U.S. or its allies is at stake. For decades the vital national security interest was deterring the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and being prepared to fight a war with them if necessary.

Today our vital national security interests are different, but Russia is still first on the list, because while they are now a friend, they still have about 25,000 nuclear weapons in their arsenal. If their government were to become hostile to the U.S. or our allies, then those weapons would allow it to threaten our survival. Therefore we continue to be very much concerned about the developments in Russia, and part of our security strategy deals with preventing their government from becoming hostile to us.

Another example of a vital national security interest is North Korea, because with their 1-million-man army and emerging nuclear weapons program they could threaten the survival of an ally—South Korea. So we have a vigorous program under way to try to stop the development of their nuclear weapons program, and we maintained a strong conventional deterrence to a a conventional attack in Korea.

A third example is the Middle East where, because we are concerned about the survival of Israel, the flow of oil, and the nuclear weapons some of those nations are developing, we also have a vital national security interest. We fought a war there in 1991 in defense of those interests.

We have other, nonvital national security interests. They are manifested in many places around the world where we are not prepared to fight a war, but we are prepared to exert what I call coercive diplomacy, which involves the threat of the use of military force if necessary. Bosnia is a current example. We have important interests there, the most outstanding of which is preventing the spread of that war outside Bosnia. In furtherance of those interests, we are threatening to use military force, and have used it in conjunction with NATO on a few occasions—very selectively and with no intention of starting a war. We use it to apply pressure to achieve a political objective.

And finally, we are using our military forces for humanitarian purposes, as in Rwanda and in Bosnia, to airlift and airdrop supplies to alleviate human suffering.

Former Defense Secy. Cheney has said that the president's proposed cuts in defense are dangerous, and while the U.S. could still win a gulf war with our present capability, we could not do it as effectively, we could not deploy as rapidly, the conflict would last longer, and casualties would be higher. How do you answer Cheney's criticisms?

I don't agree with them, but I would point out that, at the time Mr. Cheney made those remarks last year, our military forces were the same size he had projected them to be at that time. The drawdown in forces, which was started by Cheney, was proceeding at the rate of about 100,000 a year. When this administration took office we did not change that rate. Cheney was going from 2.1 million to 1.6 million active duty personnel; we decided to take it down to 1.45 million by extending the period, but not the rate of drawdown. We believe this is compatible with not just the forces to fight in

Desert Storm, but to deal with two major regional conflicts.

I want to be clear: We don't expect to fight two major regional conflicts. We expect to have sufficient forces so that if we get into one major regional conflict, we will have enough reserve forces so that no other country will be tempted to challenge us at that point, thinking that we are too weak to deal with them.

In speaking about fighting two major regional contingencies, we constantly hear the phrase "almost simultaneously." Why is this qualification made?

What is envisioned there is that the immediate drain on resources in any conflict is on lift resources, particularly airlift. If we have two conflicts simultaneously, then we have to choose between one or the other, or we have to split the lift in undesirable ways. If we have two conflicts that are several weeks apart, then we can shift the lift from one conflict to the other.

What we are really trying to protect against is getting into a war with one country, and then another country seizes the opportunity to act against our interests, thinking we are too weak to fight two wars. We assume in that case that it would take the second country a couple of weeks to get ready to seize the opportunity properly—hence the phrase "almost simultaneously." We were not envisioning two countries orchestrating or coordinating an attack on us.

The new national security strategy says that, should efforts to prevent additional countries from acquiring chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and the means to deliver fail, "U.S. forces must be prepared to deter, prevent, and defend against their use." If a hostile or potentially hostile nation attempts to develop nuclear weapons, would the U.S. ever take preemptive action to destroy that nation's nuclear capabilities—as the Israelis did with Iraq—in order to prevent it from developing this capability to more threatening proportions?

Let me choose my words carefully here. We would not want to rule out the possibility of a preemptive strike. When we looked at the crisis we were facing in North Korea, we did not rule out that option, and we publicly stated we were not ruling it out. The proliferator ought to understand that that is a potential danger. We are also not going to telegraph that punch, either.

Have we ruled out the option of using nuclear weapons if our forces were faced with defeat?

We have not ruled out that option.

Gen. McPeak, Air Force chief of staff, has said the Persian Gulf War was the first time in history that a field army was defeated by air power. While some disagree with the categorical nature of his pronouncement, few deny that the Air Force performed brilliantly, ushering in a new era of warfare where air power plays the major role. Can you give us your perspective on the role of air power in the nation's defense, and whether it has advanced so markedly as to merit a greater share of the defense budget in future years?

There have been enormous increases in the effectiveness of air power. They were brought about by a decreased vulnerability, through a combination of stealth and countermeasures advances—demonstrated in Desert Storm with our amazingly low losses in air operations. They were also brought about by a greatly enhanced intelligence capability, which tells where targets are, and when to strike them. Finally, they were brought about by the introduction of precision-guided munitions—one target, one bomb—which not only revolutionizes the effectiveness of our strikes, but dramatically changes the kind of logistics tail necessary to support air strikes.

All of these things led to McPeak's assertion—that the Iraqi field army was devastated if not fully defeated by air power—to be a correct statement. However, air power itself did not win the war. It took a joint operation to win the war, and while air power has greatly increased in effectiveness, it still requires joint air-ground-sea operations to win wars. That is what our forces are being built on, that is what our budget is based on, and that is what our tactics and doctrine are based on.

Then you don't foresee any enlargement of the Air Force budget in proportion to the other services?

No, I don't. I also wish to point out that many of these same advances in air power are being introduced in the ground forces as well. That is, the same improved intelligence, stealthiness, and emphasis on precision-guided munitions. Look at the ability of an M-1 tank to hit a moving tank several miles away—that is also a revolutionary increase in capability.

You have said that a major way you could help to ensure readiness is to change the way the DOD buys equipment—that is, reform the defense acquisition process. You said that this has been tried for decades without success, making you feel a bit like Don Quixote, sitting on his steed galloping toward the windmill, not knowing whether he will be thrown off his horse or the windmill will change the way it turns. You mentioned in an earlier speech that there were some changes in the Senate bill that did not give you all you wanted. Can you give us an update on how the changes in the acquisition process are coming along?

There are two aspects to acquisition reform. One involves changes in legislation, the other involves things we can do in the Pentagon that don't require legislative changes. There is an acquisition bill now in conference, and if it comes out favorably, it will include most of the features we want in it. It will allow us to use commercial buying practices for two different categories of purchases: small purchases (under $100,000) that add up to a lot of money, and commercial products. Those two together will be a very substantial improvement.

The other thing we hope will be in this bill is a pilot program that allows us to apply commercial buying practices to a number of large, complex weapons systems procurements. The purpose is to demonstrate that we can use commercial buying practices even on large, sophisticated programs.

The other major thing we are doing is to change in detail, step by step, the way we apply military specifications to systems, with the objective of having industrial specs become our standard and mil specs the exception. Indeed, in another six months we will require program managers to get a waiver in order to use mil specs.

I met recently with Colleen Preston, the deputy under secretary for acquisition reform, and the three service acquisition executives. They all have the bit in their teeth on these reforms, and are moving forward vigorously. I am optimistic that we are going to make real progress in this area this year. So I hope we will knock the windmill down instead of being knocked down by it.

Has any number been put out on the savings you expect to realize over a five-year period?

No. I tried to get numbers for that, but they are hard to nail down, so I have to choose between not quoting a number and quoting a number that I couldn't back up.

Edward Luttwak of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has written in* Foreign Affairs *that the U.S. is declining to act the role of a great power because it is not willing to pay the price in casualties. The leitmotif of the gulf war, he says, was minimizing casualties. He concludes that this constraint puts us at a great disadvantage, because we will only risk lives in situations that have grown dramatically prominent; this rules out the most efficient use of force —earlier rather than later—to prevent escalation rather than having to fight a war at full strength. Has our fear of casualties placed this constraint on us?

I read the Luttwak article. It is a good article. He is always a thoughtful person, with very provocative ideas. To answer that question, I would have to refer back to the answer I gave you to the first question, where I said our military strategy was designed to deal with three contingencies. In that first category—vital national security interests—I don't think what Luttwak says applies. If we were to get in a war with Korea over their use of nuclear weapons, or their invasion of South Korea, I think we are politically and psychologically prepared to stand up to the North Koreans and fight back. We have the military readiness and capability to soundly defeat them. That would involve many casualties on both sides. I think when the American public sees vital national security interests at stake they are psychologically prepared for that.

In the last case—humanitarian peace-keeping operations—where the public sees us going over to help other people, as in Somalia, and then sees our people being killed by the people we are trying to help, that is very hard to take. In that case no, we are not prepared to take casualties. When I sent forces over to Rwanda, I met with the commanding officers and said, your number one task is to provide for the security of your forces. Don't take any chances in that regard. That doesn't mean we won't have any casualties, because operations like that have certain risks to them, but we are going to be very careful to minimize that risk.

The intermediate situation is the hard one. That is the case where a national security interest is at stake, and we are using coercive diplomacy, which includes the threat of using military force. We may actually engage in a military operation, such as in the NATO air strike against the Serbs. There is a risk that one of our planes will get shot down. Those are untested waters. We don't know how the public is going to react to that case.

There appears to be a lot of opposition on Capitol Hill to going into Haiti. Without political support, wouldn't it be a tough call?

The opposition is in several different categories. One aspect of it simply questions whether it is in our national interest. Most of the negative comments about Haiti are "don't get involved with them at all, they are not in our national interest." I have contended, and the president contends, that it is in the national interest; however, it is not a vital national interest, —it doesn't threaten the survival of the U.S. But we do have a national interest in promoting democracy in the hemisphere, and we have an interest in preventing a flow of refugees. Those two interests alone certainly warrant the coercive diplomacy we use there today. They don't warrant a full-scale war; whether they warrant an action which is designed to throw out the regime is a matter of debate right now.

Interview by **Johan Benson**